

Redistricting forum draws several views

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Majority want Acadiana to have more representation

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A majority of local politicians, activists and residents speaking during a Tuesday evening meeting with state congressional members favored giving more state representation to Acadiana, keeping the state's 22nd senate district intact and keeping Lafayette and Lake

Charles in the same U.S. Congressional district.

"Typically, voters pick who represents them," said Pearson Cross, chair of UL's political science department, after the event. "The somewhat dangerous part of redistricting is that the elected officials choose the voters. It's a reverse democratic process."

Numerous politicians

from across the region went to the Acadiana Center for the Arts to hear members of the state's Committee on House and Governmental Affairs and the Committee on Senate and Governmental Affairs discuss how the redistricting process will work and to give local input to the officials working in Baton Rouge. The state officials came here as part of our public hearing tour across the state to gauge public

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Chairman Sen. Robert W. Kostelka, District 35 from Monroe, bottom center, opens the Louisiana House and Governmental Affairs Committee public hearing Tuesday about the redistricting process at the Acadiana Center for the Arts in Lafayette.

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input about the process.

The state legislature will convene in special session on March 20 to redraw district lines based on the 2010 U.S. Census data.

The legislature will establish new state house and senate districts, U.S. congressional districts and state Supreme Court, Courts of Appeal, Public Service Commission and Board of Elementary and Secondary Education districts.

That process is poised to be a contentious one because one of the state's U.S. congressmen will lose a seat based on the new census data. State officials said a common misperception is the state will drop to six U.S. Congressmen from seven because of population loss here.

In reality, they said, the drop is not because of population loss but rather because Louisiana failed to grow at comparable rates to national and southern peers.

Cross commended the politicians for making the process transparent and for gauging public input.

A number of Cross' students in his state and local government class attended the event to see firsthand how the local process works.

During public comments, numerous people expressed the desire for Acadiana to gain representation in the state legislature.

Greg Gothreaux, president and CEO of the Lafayette Economic Development Authority, said the area can gain such representation while adhering to state and federal regulations that must be followed during the redistricting process.

Gothreaux said the Acadiana region should have five members in the state House of Representatives out of 105 total and have two state senators out of 39 total.

City-Parish President Joey Durel echoed this sentiment in remarks on behalf of the Council of Government, which consist of all local politicians.

He said because Lafayette grew more than the state and southern average during the past decade, so too should the region's representation. Durel said previously he expects the area to gain both a house member and a senator.



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The Louisiana house and Governmental Affairs Committee public hearing was held Tuesday about the redistricting process at the Acadiana Center for the Arts in Lafayette.

"All we're asking for is that we get representation in Lafayette that commences with the census data," Durel told the state officials.

A number of other people spoke in favor of keeping the state's 22nd senatorial district intact. These individuals favored keeping St. Martin and Iberia parishes together because of those regions' long history of working well together.

Fred Mills, who was recently elected as the

senator for that district, campaigned partly on the premises of fighting to keep the state's 22nd senatorial district intact and told the state officials he strongly favors keeping Iberia and St. Martin in the same district.

Some state politicians have favored the creation of a "coastal district" to account for the loss of one of the state's U.S. congressional seat. That district would span from West to East across the state's shore and give the gulf

region here one voice in Congress.

That plan, however, would split Lafayette from long-time partner Lake Charles. Local government officials in both Lafayette and Lake Charles have opposed this "coastal district."

Charles Boustany, the Republican representative for Lafayette and the state's seventh congressional district, also opposes this plan likely because it would jeopardize his seat.

Numerous people spoke

against the "coastal district" during Tuesday's meeting. Opponents argued one voice for all of the state's gulf coast would not be enough, while proponents said it would create a more unified source of representation in Congress.

Ernest Freyou, Iberia parish president, bucked the trend at Tuesday's meeting and briefly spoke in favor of the coastal district, which he said should "span from Cameron to St. Bernard parishes."